

Talkers successfully sent thousands of messages, enabling the Marines and this Nation to achieve victory.

The war in the Pacific was brought to a close with the help of these original 29 Navajo code talkers and the hundreds of code talkers who followed. The Navajo, who bravely served this country, despite poor governmental treatment at home, should be commended for their service. I would ask my colleagues to join me, now and forever, in paying tribute to the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers who bravely served this nation. I am including an article from a recent edition of Indian Country Today, which recognizes the significant contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers.

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NAVAJO CODE TALKERS TO GET
CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS

TRUE RECOGNITION A DECADE AFTER HEROISM
(By Brenda Norrell)

SANOSTEE, N.M.—The late Harrison Lapahie's Dine name Yieh Kinne Yah means "He finds things." His son, Harrison Lapahie Jr., is honoring his father's name by finding Navajo Code Talkers who will receive Congressional gold and silver medals.

Born here in Sanostee, officially in 1923 but closer actually to 1928, Harrison Lapahie served in the U.S. Marines using his Native tongue to transmit the code never broken by the Japanese during World War II. Aircraft bombers were "Jay-Sho" buzzards, dive-bombers were "Gini" chicken hawks and battleships were "Lo-Tso" whales.

The original 29 Navajo Code Talkers who created the code will join George Washington, Robert Kennedy, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela as recipients of the Congressional gold medal, the nation's highest civilian honor.

With beautiful piano music and galloping horses, an eagle and an American flag on his Web site, Harrison Lapahie's son Harry links readers worldwide to the legacy and history of the Navajo warriors being honored more than half a century after their heroism with their Dine-based military code.

Charles Hedin, Navajo working in health recovery with veterans in Denver, discovered

the search for his uncle on the Web site. The late John Willie Jr. was among the original 29 being sought to be honored in Washington this month.

"I was surfing the Web and I landed on Mr. Lapahie's Web site. I didn't know Zonnie Gorman was searching for relatives of Code Talkers. Filled with overwhelming pride, I called her and explained that John Willie Jr. was my uncle."

"We compared some notes and I also helped her to find Adolf Murgursky, another Code Talker."

Willie did not live long enough to receive his recognition.

"I have mixed emotions because the recognition for my uncles' war contributions has come 50 years later," Hedin said, "He was one of the first 29."

Still, he said, "I am so proud it is hard to express the feelings."

Like Lapahie, Zonnie Gorman honors the memory of her father, Carl Nelson Gorman. The late artist, professor and storyteller and father of internationally renowned artist R. C. Gorman was president of the Navajo Code Talkers Association before his death in 1998.

Gorman, struggling to find the last five of the original 29 code talkers, said plans are being completed with the White House for the award ceremony. Another ceremony later in the summer on the Navajo Nation will honor nearly 400 other Navajo Code Talkers with silver medals.

Lapahie's Web site includes rare, original letters concerning creation of the code and his father's original maps from World War II in the Pacific, along with recognition from Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.

Bingaman introduced legislation in April 2000 and pressed Congress to honor Navajo Code Talkers with gold and silver medals. The bill was signed into law Dec. 21, 2000, and the U.S. Mint began designing the special gold and silver medals.

"It has taken too long to properly recognize these soldiers, whose achievements have been obscured by twin veils of secrecy and time. As they approach the final chapter of their lives, it is only fitting that the nation pay them this honor," Bingaman said.

Another secret is revealed in the House bill that describes the code kept secret for 23 years and declassified in 1968.

"Some code talkers were guarded by fellow Marines, whose role was to kill them in case of imminent capture by the enemy."

There are also the names of others who did not live long enough to be recognized, young Navajos who died in combat in Okinawa, Guam, Iwo Jima and other on far away shores and hilltops.

Navajo Code Talkers killed in action were Paul Begay, Johnson Housewood, Peter Johnson, Jimmy Kelly Sr., Paul Kinlachcheeny, Leo Kirk, Ralph Morgan, Sam Morgan, Willie Notah, Tom Singer, Alfred Tsosie, Harry Tsosie and Howard Tsosie.

In the Web tribute to his father, Lapahie says Navajos have been warriors time and again since they signed the Treaty of 1868 with the United States.

"When the United States entered World War II in 1941, the Navajos again left the canyons, plains and mesa's of their reservation homes to join the armed forces and played a crucial role in such combat arenas as Guadalcanal, Saipan, Bougainville, Tinian, Anzio, Salerno, Normandy, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and countless other bloody islands and forgotten battlefields."

More than 3,600 young Navajo men and women joined the armed forces during World War II.

"Proportionately, that figure represents one of the highest percentages of total population in the armed service of any ethnic group in the United States."

Lapahie's Web site includes his father's translation of the Marine Corps Hymn into Navajo and a letter from the president of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. Lt. Gen. Ron Christmas writes of an upcoming print honoring the Navajo Code Talkers and notes Lapahie's translation of the corps hymn.

In remembering his father, Harry said, "There is a story when Dad was strolling on one of the islands, and went into a Japanese military site."

"Yet he was untouched because the Japanese thought that he was Japanese!"

Harry's father died in his Los Angeles apartment Nov. 26, 1985, and is buried near Aztec, N.M., not far from the Ute Boarding School in Ignacio, Colo., he attended as a child where he learned his baking skills.